

A Tale of Two Cities : Urban Tourism Development and Major Events in Australia

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Introduction

This paper examines the role of major events as a component of strategic planning and development for tourism in two Australian cities. Key issues include urban tourism, place marketing, events management and the roles of public/private partnerships in urban tourism development.

The cities of Melbourne and Perth merit examination, having common characteristics with many state or provincial capitals in large and highly urbanised countries such as Canada. In such countries the sparse population and devolution of political power from the national has enhanced the status of capitals state as tourism gateways and as centres for decision-making about tourism and events across their respective hinterlands and states. As relatively modern cities it may be argued that Perth and Melbourne exemplify destinations which lack “must see” historic and other iconic settings which has prompting the pursuit of events-based strategies. These are viewed as offering an alternative to developing tangible tourism icons and as an opportunity for destination positioning This paper aims to have applicability to a variety of different urban settings, particular for cities contemplating events as an appropriate development strategy.

Definitions and Scope of Urban Tourism

The term “urban tourism” describes tourism activity which occurs in metropolitan areas and involves interactions between visitors and urban environments, characterised by close concentrations of population. Visitors to urban areas are motivated by a range of purposes including business, conference, VFR, and leisure and special interest such as sport, education or culture. Though cities have existed for almost as long as human civilisation, the blossoming of urban tourism has coincided with the de-industrialisation of cities, and the rise of the information economy. Much urban tourism is now associated with “post-modern” cities with their growing emphasis on spectacle, image and lifestyle. The commercial impetus towards the staging of televised events and the apparently insatiable interest amongst both residents and tourists explains the move by many cities towards a closer alignment between their tourism and major events strategies.

Research Questions

The paper examines four issues linking urban tourism and the hosting of major events: What significance has been attached to the hosting of major events as a component of strategic planning for tourism in the two cities?

2. What does the research underpinning tourism strategy generally and events strategy in particular reveal about the effectiveness of the respective events strategies in the two cities?
3. To what extent have the two cities espoused public/private partnerships in their pursuit of major events and with what degree of success?

Scale and Significance

It is important to place Perth and Melbourne in the context of urban tourism more widely. Prominent urban tourism destinations such as London, Paris and New York serve multiple tourism purposes. They feature concentrations of individual tourist attractions (the Houses of Parliament, the Statue of Liberty), as well as functioning as gateways to other destinations generally and to their hinterlands in particular. Whereas railway termini were the symbols of cities as centres of the primary transport networks in previous eras, airports now fulfil this gateway role. Cities may function as Tourism Destination Regions, as Tourism Transit Regions (airports and stopovers) and of course as Tourism Generating Regions (Leiper 1979). In the context of the present study, the emphasis is on the tourism activity that takes place within the relevant cities, although the role of events in linking city attractions and adjoining hinterlands must also be taken into account.

Determinants of Supply and Demand

Since major urban tourism precincts function as attractions for locals as well as for out-of-town visitors, the supply side of tourism in urban areas typically involves a role for or participation by city residents. Tourism must compete for attention with an array of other urban functions, impacting upon the lives of locals. Within cities there is limited scope to develop or construct exclusive tourist environments such as resorts. Particular locales may be predominantly frequented by tourists but the issue of contested use between locals and visitors is ever present. Spectacles and special events offer an opportunity to target both residents and visitors in a complementary manner.

Until recently studies of tourism demand rarely focussed on urban areas as destinations. The conventional view depicted urbanisation as having led to alienation and a desire for escape. This began with the mass exodus during holiday periods from the newly expanding and industrialising cities of the Victorian era to the newly established seaside resorts. The process of post-industrialisation has led to an improvement in the urban environment and to the appeal of cities as destinations. Urban and non-urban dwellers are attracted equally by the “bright lights” of the city and by the concentration of social

activities. The increasing practice in the developed world to take multiple “short break” holidays has also worked in favour of city locations because they offer easy accessibility and a range of readily available activities. The internationalisation of major events (propelled by the influence of global television rights) has added to the appeal of cities and has prompted city and state authorities to pursue event-based strategies as a means of increasing visitation.

Key Urban Planning and Development Issues

Outside urban areas, planning and development issues often focus around the natural environment with pressure to locate tourism developments close to the most attractive scenic areas. The pressures are different in the case of cities. Because of high land prices and the more concentrated population, different commercial pressures impact upon proposed tourism developments. Up-scale leisure-only hotel properties in inner urban areas are relatively rare since properties which are able to attract the higher yield corporate market are favoured. Much of the pressure in urban areas focuses on the desire or otherwise to preserve significant elements of the built environment. The process of deciding whether to demolish and rebuild or to restore historic constructs affects urban planning generally and urban of tourism in particular. Events and spectacles can provide a mechanism for bringing outsiders into the city without the need for lavish tourism-only investment. However in the case of a city such as Perth, where many of the city centre historic buildings were demolished during earlier phases of development, the capacity of events to overcome these losses remains largely untested.

Within the countries of the “new world” (Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA), the urban built heritage is rarely more than 150 years old. This contrasts with “historic towns” such as York, Siena and Salzburg where the historic built environment constitutes the primary appeal for tourism. In the latter settings, planning controls are generally strong and there is an expectation that new tourism developments will be sympathetic to the immediate locale and to the urban fabric. This leaves limited scope to undertake entirely new development. In both the old world and the new world, there are cities whose function has changed, often leaving derelict or underutilised areas (Law 1993). Inner urban areas located close to the waterfront offer development opportunities within the context of the historic significance of the site. In an increasing number of cities the construction of event venues has been clustered around such areas. The various UK Garden Festivals have provided a strong focus for the connection between events and inner urban redevelopment. In Melbourne the Southbank retail precinct is located on the site of a former sweet factory and forms a backdrop for many inner-based festivities.

The transformation of cities into centres of spectacle has created challenges for urban planners as well as opportunities. In the lead up to the 2004 Olympics in Athens, the development of new facilities within the context of a centuries old historic infrastructure is proving a major challenge.

Literature Review

A number of textbooks published over the past decade have begun to provide a framework for the investigation of urban tourism (Page and Hall 2002, Page 1995). Cockerell (1997) examined the growing demand for urban tourism in Europe cities and the various challenges to achieving the appropriate balance between economic development and environmental control. Symptomatic of the growing literature on the marketing and image development of cities, Kotler, Haider and Rein have applied the concept of place marketing to urban settings (1993). Ashworth (1992) has studied the role of cities as tourist settings as well as places to invest and live. Jansen-Verbeke has examined the relationship between the features which give cities appeal for tourists and their attractiveness as leisure settings for residents (1986). In their examination of the role of research in destination market development in Wales Selby and Morgan focussed on the “reconstruction of place image” (1996). Lawton and Page analysed issues of promotion, product and visitor expectations in Auckland, New Zealand.

The difficulty of developing and applying a universally applicable model to cities is highlighted by the chapter “Tourism in British Provincial Cities: a Tale of Four Cities” (Law 1993). The four cities referred to in the title are the largest in the UK outside London. However because of the overwhelming dominance of London and the centralisation of power in a unitary state such as the United Kingdom, these major cities are correctly labelled “provincial”. Equivalent cities in Australia are generally the capitals of their respective states and enjoy considerable political autonomy from the Commonwealth Government. The term “provincial” is less applicable in this context Perth positioned itself as the “Western Gateway to Australia” for the Olympics. One could not envisage the local government of Britain’s provincial cities being able to adopt such an approach because of the extent of centralisation in London and its predominance as an international gateway. This provides a different dynamic in assessing the role and prospects of Australian cities as centres for international profile events.

Kozak and Rimmington (1999) applied the concept of industry competitiveness to city destinations. Competitiveness is often a rationale given by city government representatives for the development of event strategies. A study by Faulkner, Oppermann and Fredline (1999) on South Australia concluded that the state capital of Adelaide, was not perceived as a strength. Only two of the state’s eight “core” attractions were in Adelaide and both of these were located outside the inner urban area.

Urban regeneration in Australian cities has emerged as an issue of both public debate and in the academic literature. Hall and Hamon’s work on casinos and regeneration has relevance to Melbourne in particular where a previously industrial area (Southbank) was redeveloped as the site for a casino and entertainment centre (1996). The use of the term “entertainment ” is indicative of the desire to position the casino complex as an events centre and “happening place.” The site is adjacent to the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre which has assisted emerging success as a setting for major events. The increasing inner city residential populations have emerged as an particularly in Sydney and Melbourne and to some extent in Perth. Australian cities do not have the

tradition of inner urban living that is common in Europe. Tourism is, however, emerging as a catalyst for enhancing the liveliness of the inner city. Growing inner urban populations are also beginning to offer event organisers with a population base, conveniently located. When Melbourne's Docklands stadium was first built there was a minimal population base nearby. The proliferation of apartments has changed this.

Tourists visit cities for a range of reasons including shopping, eating, culture, special events, theatre and gambling (Hall, Jenkins and Kearsley 1997). There is, however, less understanding about whether event strategies are sustainable as a means of positioning destinations effectively and sustainably. Perth and Melbourne do not necessarily provide answers to these questions as yet, but some observations may be made about progress in linking their respective tourism and events strategies.

A special event may be defined as a one-time or infrequently occurring event of limited duration that provides consumers with a leisure and social opportunity beyond their everyday experience (Jago and Shaw, 1998). The number of special events appears to have been increasing and continues to do so (Getz 1997; Getz and Wicks 1993; Janiske 1994). It has been claimed that the special events segment is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry, influencing both day trip and overnight visitation (Backman, Backman, Uysal and Mohr Sunshine 1995). Events can supplement a city's range of tourist attractions and provide a focus for media coverage of the destination, leading to the prospect of repeat visitation.

Events have become an important part of the tourism strategies of many cities. Those less well endowed with natural or man-made attractions may use events as the basis for attracting tourists and for creating the reputation of being as a "happening place". In the case of cities that have an existing range of attractions, events can stimulate repeat visitation much sooner than would have otherwise have been the case.

The expression 'event tourism' first gained currency during the 1980s in recognition of the growing link between events and tourism (Getz 1997). It involves "the systematic planning, development and marketing of festivals and special events as tourist attractions, catalysts and image builders" (Getz and Wicks 1993, p. 2). Event tourism is not a new phenomenon, but its scale is unprecedented, prompting many cities to pursue a strategy of specialising in the creation and hosting of special events (Lynch and Veal 1996).

The economic benefits of special events for cities are well documented. Events can also enhance the image of a city, thereby prompting longer-term visitation. Larger scale events often require the development of additional infrastructure and such projects are often located in rundown districts of the inner city. The facilities and stadiums developed to stage larger events become available for the staging of subsequent events and may help either to establish tourism precincts, or to provide recreational opportunities for the local community. Such benefits have flowed in the case of the Olympic Games in Barcelona and Atlanta, the World Expo in Brisbane and the Americas Cup in Fremantle. In these cases, the resulting urban regeneration has played a part in transforming the image of the

cities, has prompted the formation of tourism precincts and has provided for longer-term recreational use.

Following the staging of a successful event which promotes the city externally, enhanced community pride is often evident amongst residents. After Adelaide successfully hosted the Formula One Grand Prix in 1995, residents showed greater support for the pursuit of opportunities to host other events. (Burns, Hatch and Mules, 1986). Since patronage for special events in cities is derived predominantly from the local community, involvement by the local community in the planning and conduct of special events is essential for their long-term future. Most of the longer established festivals and special events, were celebrations of certain aspects of life within a community. Tourists are increasingly seeking authentic experiences, which involve some engagement with local people. Where a strong connection is evident with the community events can assist in this process. Many of the most successful special events and festivals provide visitors with insights into the local community (Arnold 2001).

The impact of hosting events on supply and demand

Major events generally make use of existing city infrastructure. Mega events, such as the Olympics are an exception since they usually involve substantial new investments. Events often stimulate greater than normal use of existing venues, accommodation, shops and restaurants. By staging events during quieter times of the year and attracting visitors when facilities would otherwise be under-utilised, cities can reduce the extremes of seasonality, increase aggregate visitor numbers and generate greater revenues for individual business.

To avoid the temptation of staging events exclusively during peak periods, substantial planning is required. All too often, key events are staged during peak times, which makes it difficult for tourists to find accommodation or else forces them to pay premium prices and squeeze out otherwise regular patrons such as tour groups of events organisers are to capitalise on the ability of events to reduce seasonality, they need active encouragement to host events during quieter times. The volume of patronage may be lower but the yield will likely be higher. Event strategies may be crafted to suit the conditions prevailing during the quieter periods.

Key success factors

Over the past decade, exaggerated claims have been made about the beneficial impacts arising from hosting major events in cities. However, there is also a growing realisation that the forecast benefits of events are not always realised (Pers Comm Directors of Australia's State Event Agencies, March 2003). Since the costs of staging certain events have the potential to outweigh the benefits many state agencies now require the conduct of, comprehensive post-event evaluations in cases where public funds are provided.

To enhance the contribution of events to urban tourism, a number of factors should be considered. Preference should be given to events which are consistent with the prevailing or desired city image or have strong connections with the essence of the place, leading to the prospect of developing a unique selling proposition. The “Glasgow Smiles Better” campaign was based on the city’s reputation for friendliness. Such positioning may help to minimise the risk of ‘copy cat’ events being developed elsewhere, prompting a loss of market share. Involvement by the local population can lead to a genuine sense of ownership on the part of residents as was evident with the success of the volunteer programme during the Olympics in Sydney and the Master Games in Melbourne. Since the majority of event attendees are local residents, positive local sentiment will enhance local attendance and enliven the atmosphere surrounding an event. This, in turn, will make an events more attractive to tourists.

The spatial and temporal dimensions of events should link closely with the needs of the host city. Strong connections to tourism and recreation precincts in the host city will help to maximise the benefits that the city derives from the event. Similarly, proactive involvement by local authorities is needed to reduce seasonal extremes. Regular communication and a shared understanding are needed between destination marketers and event organisers with a view to streamlining marketing and planning activities. Effective partnerships can ensure that the appropriate events are suited to the relevant city in terms of image, timing, markets, and infrastructural use. Partnerships should also embrace the private sector, particularly as commercialisation and sponsorship are now integral components of the viability of most events.

Case Studies

The authors previously have analysed the tourism performance and prospects of two Australian State Capitals, namely Melbourne (in the state of Victoria) and Perth (in Western Australia) (King and Jago 2000, 2001). Whilst differing markedly in terms of their history, culture and location, it was found that the tourism strategic and marketing plans of the two cities relied heavily upon special events. Since neither city has an identifiable tourism icon, there has been a tendency to “manufacture” attractions through the hosting of special events with a view to boosting tourism and the tourism industry. Although tourism has developed very differently in the two cities, close similarities may be observed in the approaches adopted to develop an events-based strategy.

Melbourne

Melbourne, the capital city of the state of Victoria, was Australia’s leading city during the Victorian era. During the 20th century Sydney emerged as Australia’s largest city and it is now the national gateway (99% of visitors to Australia arrive by air), leaving Melbourne to adapt to its unfamiliar “second city syndrome”. Melbourne lacks Sydney’s iconic attractions, such as the Harbour Bridge and Opera House. There is substantial rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney though it is generally acknowledged that Melbourne cannot to compete with Sydney in terms of international tourism. All of the major international airlines and the vast majority of the inbound tourism operators are for

example Sydney-based. Melbourne has had to work harder than Sydney to attract its share of international visitation.

During the 1980s, Melbourne's tourism industry experienced subdued conditions as the state of Victoria faced a combination of growing government debt, a stock market crash, and recession. During the 1990s, Melbourne shrugged off its reputation for conservatism under its dynamic though abrasive state premier, Jeff Kennett, and focussed on developing a reputation as a centre for major sporting and cultural events. The State Government set out to project Melbourne as Australia's "events capital".

Melbourne was able to draw upon a number of competitive advantages. It had been the host city for the 1956 Olympic Games and has a wide array of international standard sporting facilities located within a two-kilometre radius of the city centre. Melbournians have a reputation as passionate spectators of sport and sporting events staged in Melbourne are extremely well patronised. Melbourne even breaks attendance records for sports such as rugby that are not mainstream within the state. This level of interest amongst residents and their willingness to consider unfamiliar sporting codes provides a solid basis for an events-led tourism strategy.

To underpin the strategy of staging special events, Premier Kennett emphasised Melbourne's international standard sporting venues and the city's ability to attract significant local crowds. The Melbourne Major Events Company was established in 1991 to attract leading international events to Melbourne and, assisted by a healthy budget appropriation, it was able to outbid other Australian cities. It lured a number of events from other states, notably the Australian Formula One Grand Prix, from Adelaide and the Heineken Golf Classic, from Perth. As a result of Melbourne's dominance in these bidding wars frictions developed between the various capital cities.

In 1992, a Major Events Unit was formed within the State Tourism Organisation (Tourism Victoria) to cooperate with the Melbourne Major Events Company in attracting events to Melbourne. Whilst the Melbourne Major Events Company was geared towards mega events such as the Olympics and the Grand Prix, the Major Events Unit was intended to focus on international events of a slightly lesser magnitude, such as world championship events. Melbourne has enjoyed considerable success in its efforts to build an event profile and now has substantial recognition as the events capital of Australia, although Sydney does host more events within particular categories.

Melbourne's success in the events area is the result of a strategic approach, involving a calendar of annual events supplemented by a range of one-off events. In seeking to build an events calendar, scheduling has been staggered throughout the year. The effects of seasonality, for which Melbourne was well known, have been ameliorated (Melbourne winters are cooler than other mainland state capitals). The key destination marketing agencies have targeted international events that can be staged in Melbourne's winter months when tourism infrastructure is traditionally under-utilised.

Melbourne has a reputation for hosting cultural as well as for sporting events. Its excellent cultural venues have been exploited to host a range of international cultural events such as the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts. As a third element of the strategy, Melbourne aggressively pursued the business events market. Large and high quality conference and exhibition facilities were developed during the 1990s. developed Melbourne to gain a rating as one of the world's top convention cities (McCabe, Weeks and Leiper 2000).

Since most of Melbourne's event venues are within walking distance of the city centre, city businesses have benefited from the program of special events. The events attract large numbers of local spectators to the city and many visitors from outside Melbourne choose to stay within the city and undertake tourist-related activities in the adjoining areas. Over the past decade, major investments have occurred in the Southbank and Docklands developments, which border the city. They have involved substantial residential and tourism precincts on the city's riverside and harbour respectively. These developments have enhanced the city's after hours activities and have become key attractions for event attendees. They are indicative that the principles of urban regeneration are relevant to the cities of the New World as well as Europe.

Other Australian capital cities are now following Melbourne in pursuit of events as a catalyst for developing tourism, prompting Melbourne to seek new ways to maintain its advantage in an increasingly competitive market. Sydney's success in hosting the 2000 Olympic Games and the associated purpose-built infrastructure, has strengthened Sydney's competitive position. Though the event is smaller in scale and is less prestigious than the Olympics, Melbourne has won the rights to stage the 2006 Commonwealth Games helping to ensure that its sporting venues would remain world class and up-to-date. The Games will provides Melbourne with an opportunity to attract government support for redeveloping its international sport venues, thereby enhancing the prospects for hosting subsequent events. On top of the Commonwealth Games Melbourne was recently granted the rights to host the 2007 World Swimming Championships. This will help the city to sustain the momentum.

In Victoria's Tourism Industry Strategic Plan 2002-2006, special events are presented as a key strategy to increase high yield tourism for Melbourne and the state (Tourism Victoria 2002). A key objective of the plan is to continue to host a calendar of annual and biennial world-class events. Of the 15 Hallmark Events that are held in Australia each year, 12 are hosted in Melbourne which provides the city with its claim to be the event capital of Australia. According to this plan, "arts, theatre and cultural heritage" forms one of Melbourne's primary product strengths and much emphasis is given to the range of cultural events that are on offer each year. Since the successful staging of Phantom of the Opera in Melbourne in the early 1990s, Tourism Victoria has actively sought to have blockbuster musicals and stage shows launched in Melbourne for their Australian season; Mamma Mia was the most recent example. This approach has succeeded encouraging interstate and international tourists (many from New Zealand) to visit Melbourne.

Perth

Perth, capital city of Western Australia, is one of the developed world's most isolated cities. In a state covering over a third of the Australian continent, Perth is the only settlement with a population in excess of 30,000 people. To fly from Perth to the east coast of Australia where most of Australia's population resides takes more than four hours, highlighting further the sense of isolation. Just as there is substantial rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney, there is a sense of "them and us" between Perth residents and Australians living on the east coast. It is quicker for Perth residents to fly to many parts of Asia than to fly to the east coast.

Whilst Perth is surrounded by regions that offer excellent nature-based tourism activities, it has long had the reputation for being somewhat sterile. The author Bill Bryson likened Perth to Minneapolis. It lacks any form of tourism icon and tends to 'close down' outside business hours. The Western Australian Government has viewed special events as a prospective way of addressing these drawbacks. With its stable weather pattern and long hours of sunshine, Perth experiences less seasonality than other Australian cities. Nevertheless, some periods of the year are much quieter than others and events can help to counteract this problem.

EventsCorp was established by the Western Australian government in 1986 to attract and manage events that will deliver economic benefits to the state. This was the first statewide event agency established in Australia and was the precursor to a series of equivalent bodies in each of the other states

Fremantle, a small port city on the southwestern outskirts of Perth, was the home to the staging of Australia's unsuccessful defence of the 1986 America Cup yacht race. It is an example of a rundown port area being redeveloped and repositioned as a result of hosting an international special event. Fremantle is now a thriving tourist destination with an outdoor café culture. Its historic character, sandstone buildings and maritime associations (including a recently developed Maritime Museum) have provided the port with a stronger tourism reputation than Perth itself. This said, the appeal of Fremantle has been used to highlight the tourism appeal of metropolitan Perth.

In 1997, the "Best on Earth in Perth" campaign was launched with the aim of building a brand that reinforces the links between events and the city's natural attractions. This interesting positioning challenges the common association between cities and "industrial tourism" and is indicative of the improving urban amenity in cities such as Perth. The ambition of this campaign was an exclusive emphasis on events where the "best in the world" would participate. According to the statewide Partnership 21 Tourism Industry Plan, this campaign was intended to dispel the view that Western Australia lacked exciting world-class events. (WATC 2001). Twelve events are being staged during 2003 under the Best on Earth in Perth campaign ([Http://www.events.tourism.wa.gov.au](http://www.events.tourism.wa.gov.au)).

Five criteria are applied by EventsCorp in determining whether events should receive support:

- Economic impact;
- International profile;

Media impact;
Tourism packaging;
Timing.

Weightings are assigned to each criterion, with the key emphasis being the potential economic impact and prospect of building international profile. Seasonality is less pronounced in Perth than in other Australian cities. Nevertheless, encouragement is given to events that can be staged during shoulder periods. Eventscorp has been criticised because of its emphasis on sporting-related events. This has prompted greater efforts to attract cultural events and to add a cultural component to existing sporting events

As a modern city, Perth has been largely free of the problems of older industrialised cities with rundown areas. However, much of Perth's event infrastructure is located outside the central city area in venues such as the Burswood Convention Centre. Since many event attendees make use of the on-site accommodation, businesses within the city benefit less from visitors to these events. As Perth has the reputation of being lifeless outside business hours, event organisers are now encouraged to stage components of their events within the Central Business District (CBD) particularly during the evening. To encourage such activity, evening use of public buildings is permitted. As is the case in Melbourne, the number of apartment developments within Perth has grown, encouraging the view that life is returning to the city. One challenge has been that a significant proportion of these apartments have been purchased by overseas investors, many from Asia. These are left vacant for much of the year.

Collaboration between event organisers and destination marketers has been increasing. With a view to encouraging event attendees to spend more time and money in and around Perth, destination marketers are now also talking with professional conference organisers (PCOs) to encourage the incorporation of attractive experiences within the packages that they offer their clients. Mobile visitor information centres are located at most events to provide information and enticements for event attendees. More activities are being scheduled to coincide with existing events to encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more. A stronger "festival approach" is being adopted towards events, with activities, conferences and festivals staged to complement other major events and to provide a stronger sense of a complete destination experience.

A range of events is now firmly established in the calendar. Greater thought is now being given to the yield of events and the preferred type of visitor. In recognition of the high cost of attracting "big name events," increasing attention will be given to developing events which involve more prominent participation by locally based acts and performers. As is the case in Melbourne, the state tourism and events strategies have placed strong emphasis on public sector/private sector partnerships.

Conclusions

Special events can play an important role in fostering urban tourism development and a catalyst for urban renewal. They can also provide tourist with specific reasons to visit a city. Special events can be used to create or change a city's image and are important for

adding colour and life into a city's landscape. Whilst special events can be important in attracting tourists to the host city, they also provide an important recreation activity for local citizens and are effective in drawing locals back into the city precinct. Although special events play a fundamental role in the tourism plans of cities that lack iconic attractions, many cities that are well endowed with other attractions now also seek to offer a range of special events in their urban precincts to capitalise on the many benefits that events bring. This has led to a proliferation of city-based events and raises questions about the sustainability of the sector.

As reported in this paper, Melbourne and Perth are quite different in terms of their histories, cultural backgrounds, populations, and locations. However, both have actively pursued events as a central component of their tourism strategy. Since neither city has an iconic attraction, failure of the event sector would seriously undermine the viability of the tourism industry in each city. This is indicative of a growing interdependence on the ongoing success of the events strategy. At present the local communities in both cities seem to be supportive of the focus given to events. In the future the increasing cost of capturing and staging events is likely to increase the demands from event organisers for public support. This is likely to lead to greater scrutiny of the benefits of events from competing interest groups within communities.

As is evident from the Melbourne and Perth cases, urban regeneration plays a part in urban tourism development generally and urban event tourism in particular in Australia, though not to the same extent as in many European cities. Whilst Melbourne with its 3 million population continues to pursue mega events, Perth with its isolation and 1 million population, appears to be placing greater emphasis on events, which have a specific local base. Both cases show clearly that events tourism has emerged as a key component of urban tourism in Australia.

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